

Working with children that have different needs and abilities

Language Arts and Literacy

Draft

Language Arts and Literacy – children with different needs and abilities

Many children with different needs have difficulty processing, attending to, understanding, and communicating language.

Language can be defined as a complicated symbol system. Symbols can be signals: words, signs, gestures, or body movements. Children with different abilities may communicate in any of the previously mentioned signals. The use of pictures and print can provide communication support for children with different needs, while supporting emerging literacy for all children.

Many children with severe different needs and abilities do not acquire speech easily and others have poor articulation. For these children, augmentative communication—signs, symbols, and pictures—may be helpful. Sign language or picture/symbol are the most often used forms of augmentative communication. Teachers should not assume if a child cannot talk, they can not read. For some children, literacy can provide support for communication.

When using any type of alternative communication, choose signs and symbols that occur naturally and frequently in the child's environment, i.e., McDonalds®, K Mart®, Pepsi®; name cards; lunch menu; catalog; and play activities. Teachers arrange the learning environment so that every child has an opportunity to interact. Activities are arranged so that the activity and the teacher are interactive with the child's language effort.

Language and motor skills development play a critical role in the development of literacy and the readiness to read. Children with multiple different abilities may have different needs and different learning styles from a child with only a speech/language need. Include books with texture, Braille, or pop-out pictures (visual impairment), and simple concepts and repeated, rhyming text (cognitive impairment).

Children need many opportunities daily to express themselves, be creative, learn the alphabet, be exposed to reading and writing, and play in activities that prepare them for literacy. Including a photo of a child on a name card helps recognize the child and discriminate the name in print.

Pretend and dramatic play give children many opportunities to rehearse speech/communicate with each other and practice social skills. Dramatic play also allows the teacher to learn a great deal about the language competence of the child.

Children may have language impairments that are expressive, receptive, or both. Their language impairment has also been associated with a different need—some children with autism communicate with printed words or pictures, others read and spell.

Give children every opportunity to use print in various and meaningful ways. Teachers should be aware of the following signals of possible communication differences and needs:

- Difficulty understanding language
- Difficulty using language
- Not achieving developmental milestones in communication
- Hesitant to participate in verbal conversation
- Language deficits
- History of otitis media
- Hearing loss
- Multiple different needs and abilities

Strategies to encourage communication and literacy development:

- Talk about things the child likes
- Follow the child's lead
- Encourage the child to ask questions
- Use a pleasant tone of voice
- Do **not** make fun of the child's language
- Allow time to respond
- Be accepting of the child's language
- Treat the child with respect

Collaboration and inclusion are the keys to language and literacy. There is shared responsibility, knowledge, and support of parents, children, teachers, and professionals.